


PRACTICAL RESOURCES FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING
WESTERN RECORDER

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FOR THE RECORD

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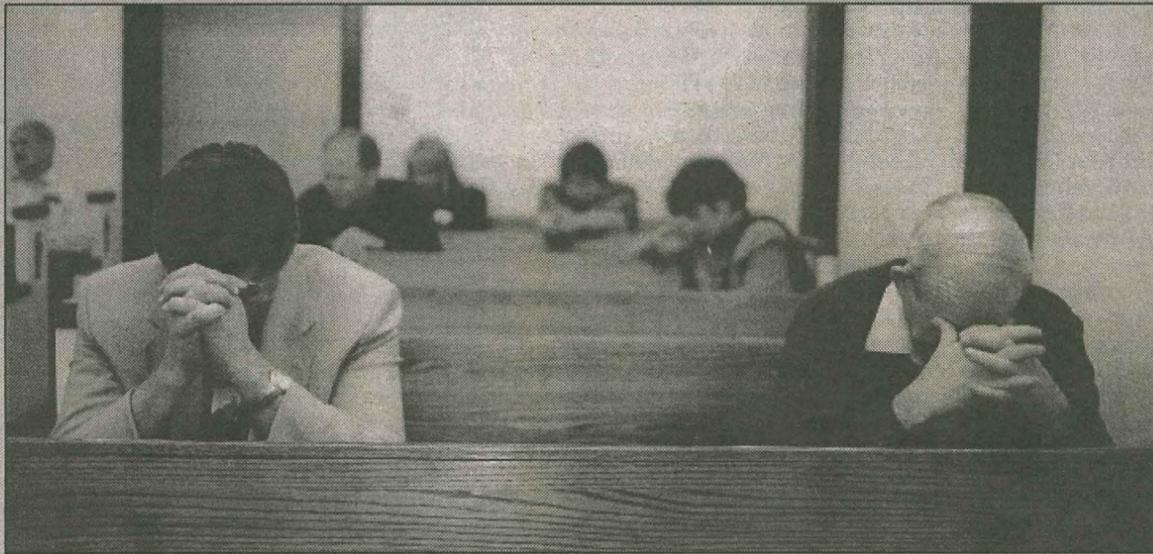
Christmas

A biblical history professor says the wise men's gifts were intended for a king. *Page 7.*

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Prayer warriors



Wilburn Bonta of Greensburg and Carl Boyd of Pike County pray during a meeting at First Baptist Church of Danville. Larry Martin, leader of the Kentucky Baptist Convention missions growth team, organizes quarterly meetings throughout the commonwealth for people to pray for spiritual awakening in Kentucky. (Photo by LeeAnn Seymour)

Grassroots prayer teams at work in Kentucky

By Brenda Smith
Kentucky Baptist Convention

LOUISVILLE—The most powerful people in Kentucky are on their knees, according to Larry Martin and a Kentucky Baptist Convention group exploring authentic spirituality.

Grassroots prayer warriors—many of them spurred by the "Experiencing God" Bible study—are asking God to bring a spiritual awakening to Kentucky and God is showing them where He is at work, said Martin, missions growth team leader for the KBC and leader of a team studying authentic spirituality.

This team is one of five KBC staff "cluster groups" studying key issues facing church and society. In addition to defining the issues, these five groups are identifying resources and tailoring KBC programs to better meet the needs of churches.

Martin said his group defines authentic spirituality as loving God "with your whole heart, mind, body and strength" and living out that love as an individual and a member of a body of believers.

The authentic spirituality cluster group's goal is to help these grassroots prayer warriors foster authentic spirituality in individuals and churches, leading to more passionate ministry and a greater vision for what God will do in Kentucky, Martin said.

A loss of intimacy with God is one possible explanation for the decline in church growth in Kentucky, Martin said.

According to the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board, the number of Kentucky Baptist church members has declined 5.8 percent from 1990 to 1997, the last year for which statistics were available.

In 1990, the ratio of Kentucky Baptist church members to state res-

idents was 1 to 6.6; in 1997, that decreased to 1 to 7.5.

Those figures suggest that Kentucky Baptist churches—many of them well-established—may have been victims of their own success, Martin said. When a church has become well established in its own culture, it is most vulnerable, he said.

At the start of a church, people are filled with a sense that the task of starting a church is so overwhelming, God must be the one to do it, Martin explained. They rely on God and trust that He will supply their needs.

As churches become more successful, they might lose sight of what God is doing, Martin continued. As a church grows, the vision of the church often shifts from following God's lead to maintaining what the church has gained, he said.

Even though programs and activities may continue to grow, spiritual growth plateaus, he added. Eventually, the entire church plateaus or begins to decline, as has been the case with many Kentucky churches, he said.

□ See KBC group seeing ..., page 3

The Big 5

Issues every church should address

Dated Material — Deliver by Wednesday, December 13

Retired missionary: God's calling gave strength

By David Winfrey
News Director

HOPKINSVILLE—From riots to robberies and shootings, Charles Hedrick saw his share of excitement while serving nine years as a Southern Baptist missionary to Nigeria.

"We felt the dangers that were involved, and we probably became more cautious about what we did," said Hedrick, who now is pastor of Henderson Memorial Baptist Church in Hopkinsville. "But we never had any fear to do the work that we were there to do."

The retired missionary said his family's sense of call was the foundation

on which they built their nine years in a country where neither riots by Muslim extremists nor bandits ambushes were uncommon.

"Those were not the things that determined our staying there or our leaving," Hedrick said. "We were there because God called us there, and we're here now because we believe this is the place God has called us."

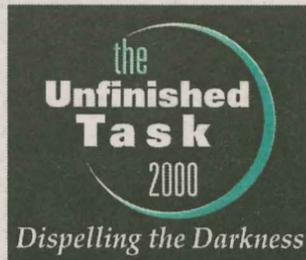
Hedrick insists that sense of calling will make or break any missionary, regardless of the setting.

"I've seen them come and leave in a week," he said of other missionaries.

"If they're not called, then the difficulties that they face on the field—the culture, the language, the dangerous situations that they may be living under—will tend to convince them to return home. ... But if that call is sure, that call will keep you there."

Hedrick said he experienced that call in 1987 when he was pastor of First Baptist Church of Mount Vernon.

□ See Former missionary ..., page 8



Kentuckians take spirit of Christmas to those in need

By Victoria Moon
Staff Writer

FLORENCE—Throughout the commonwealth, Baptist volunteers and mission centers are living out the biblical dictum "it is more blessed to give than receive" by taking Christmas to residents who otherwise would have no Christmas at all.

"This time of year is a giving time," said Lisa McClain, activities coordinator for Genesis Home, a residence facility of the Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children. "Churches have been really digging in deep to meet the needs here, especially during Christmas."

While some people take for granted such traditional trappings as brightly-lit trees, piles of presents, mouth-watering goodies and fellowship with friends and family, statistics show a growing number of people are too poor or disenfranchised to provide for their most basic needs, let alone holiday extras.

According to the U.S. Census, approximately 32 million Americans live in poverty.

But Kentucky Baptist individuals and organizations are bringing light into that darkness through ministry to the less fortunate throughout Kentucky. From those on the back side of Florence's race tracks to low-income urban neighborhoods in Louisville, the true message of Christmas is shown in the stories of volunteers meeting the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of those who often are overlooked during a busy holiday season.

■ *Turfway tidings.* At the Turfway Race Track in Florence, volunteer Anita Roberts is planning her annual Christmas party and worrying about, of all things, basketballs.

"We really need 40 basketballs by December the 12th," she said last week. It's not that Roberts is a rabid basketball fan. She's simply coordinating efforts between local churches and way's race track ministry to ply gifts for more than 200 children whose parents work the back stretch of the track.

Roberts, who works as a Kentucky Baptist Mission Service Corps volunteer, has spent the last 15 years meeting the many needs of the "backsiders," the grooms, hot walkers and exercise riders who live and work at the track. These workers often are living below the poverty level.

□ See Kentucky Baptists ..., page 6

New NAMB strategists target multi-housing, ethnic needs

"If we're going to reach America, we've got to help more churches catch a kingdom-expanding, church-planting vision."

Dennis Mitchell, director of NAMB's church planting group multiplication team

By James Dotson
SBC North American Mission Board

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP)—The Southern Baptist North American Mission Board has added new national leaders coordinating church planting among Hispanics, African-Americans and—in a new area to receive full-time attention—people living in multi-housing developments.

Chris McNary serves as national missionary for multi-housing; Bobby Sena serves on NAMB staff as national Hispanic specialist; and Ken Weathersby is the national African-American specialist.

Dennis Mitchell, director of the multiplication team of NAMB's church planting group, said the new leadership emphasizes NAMB's commitment to provide strategists to help facilitate a church multiplication movement among Southern Baptist churches in the United States, Canada and U.S. territories. He said only about 4 percent of Southern Baptists' 41,000 churches are involved in church planting.

"If we're going to reach America, we've got to help more churches catch a kingdom-expanding, church-planting vision," Mitchell said.

The new role of a church planting national missionary for multi-housing will help churches, associations and

state conventions reach people living in apartment complexes, condominiums, manufactured housing and other types of multi-housing communities, Mitchell said.

"With an estimated 90 percent of the 100 million people in the United States and Canada living in these communities not attending church on a regular basis, we have no choice but to reach them and seek to lead them into active involvement in a New Testament church in their own community," he said.

McNary previously served as African-American missions leader for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. He also has served as a pastor and church staff member in Memphis, Tenn., and St. Louis.

The position of African-American specialist was expanded with the calling of Weathersby to include working with recent immigrants representing 48 people groups of African descent now living in the United States.

Since 1998 Weathersby has been a NAMB missionary, serving as Nehemiah Project director and church planting professor at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Previously Weathersby was state evangelism director for the Tennessee Baptist Convention; a NAMB missionary in Tennessee; and pastor of churches in Baton Rouge, La., and Cincinnati.

Evangelistic ads reap 48 converts

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP)—A recent series of nationwide evangelistic television commercials has resulted in 48 professions of faith in Christ. The ads, sponsored by the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board, also have produced more than 6,200 total responses to an offer of a free "Jesus" video.

Unlike previous efforts, the campaign was aired on only three television programs on one network in an effort to focus media evangelistic efforts where they can be most effective. The approach also allows the agency to alert volunteer "telephone encouragers" of the exact hours they are needed to answer calls.

"The whole idea was to try to reach a particular audience that we think would be responsive," said Ron Lawson, NAMB's media strategy director.

The telephone encouragers work as part of NAMB's Evangelism Response Center, a system that channels calls from viewers directly into

the homes of specially trained volunteers available to talk with them about Christ.

The advertising was placed on the Turner Broadcasting System on four different programs during the period of Nov. 13-21: two episodes of "Little House on the Prairie," one episode of "Cosby" and during the movie "Ghost."

Two of NAMB's most popular TV spots were used, one in which Mary Lou Retton describes Jesus Christ as a "perfect 10" and the other, titled "Living Water," taken from the words of Christ from Scripture. Viewers were invited to call a toll-free number to receive a free copy of the "Jesus" video.

"So far it seems clear that this kind of short, focused campaign on a national television network is a very effective way to reach an audience with the gospel," Lawson said. "We will definitely look for ways of implementing this approach in the future."

Sena transferred from national Hispanic field staff for NAMB's church planting group. He previously was a staff member and missionary for the former Southern Baptist Home Mis-

sion Board; staff member of the Baptist General Convention of Texas; field representative for the American Bible Society; and pastor of churches in Atlanta and Dallas.

Beth Moore cites God's intervention in diverse areas of daily life

NASHVILLE (BP)—Departing from a prepared message for 9,600 women attending her Living Proof seminar in Nashville, Dec. 1-2, popular author and speaker Beth Moore said God gave her a new word for them at the last minute.

Moore said God asked her to pray over and dedicate several "very specific categories" of people. The groups included:

■ Active mothers. "The most important thing you can do for your children, even if they are grown, is to give your heart entirely over to the Lord. Our children are looking for authenticity, not perfection."

■ Single moms. This group included "anybody raising young 'uns in a household by yourself—whether divorced or widowed," Moore said. She urged single moms to ask God for "a

double portion of whatever you need. At no point are you asking too much of God."

■ Single adults. "The Word of God says 'for now.' Until He tells you differently, He is your husband and He wants you to be a chaste and pure bride before Him."

■ People serving in the music field. "You belong to God. Do not take on the practices of the nation around you," Moore said. She said musicians and people who have to be "up front" have the very challenging task of trying to contain their egos as they lead in worship.

■ People going through "a real valley of tears," a time of sadness. "During the most difficult times, even if you are literally crawling your way through life right now, you must keep believing in God's Word," she counseled.

■ People who are living dead; the walking dead. "You are people who have had something so devastating happen in your life. ... Somewhere along the way, you have just shut down," she said. "God has promised a resurrected life for you. He can be released to live through you in ways you have never dreamed and never experienced."

■ People who are seeking a specific direction in life. "This is someone with a decision to make, someone at a crossroads in their life, someone who needs something so specific from God. You need a word from Him."

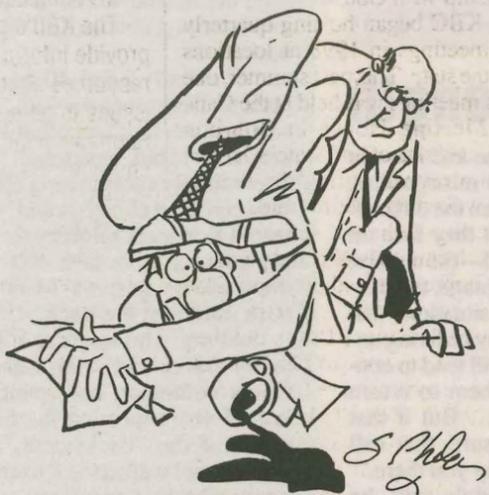
■ Anyone with a stronghold who needs to be set free. Moore noted that before individuals can be free of any kind of stronghold on their lives, such as addictions or compulsions, they must let go of any pride regarding the

issue. "You have got to be in the Word of God," she added.

■ Anyone who is ill and who is desiring God to heal them. "I do not believe in a prosperity gospel," Moore said. "But what I can tell you is that God will glorify the Son in your life."

■ People who need deliverance from unforgiveness. "Girlfriends, this is a hard one," she said. But not forgiving is like a disease, she added. "Unforgiveness is spiritual cancer, and it turns into bitterness. Everyone surrounding us is affected by it."

■ People who are servants of God or in any area of church leadership. "God is up to here with ego in the church; He is totally up to here," Moore said as she waved her hand over her head. "We need to become servants before Him. God is looking for servants."



Working out the order of worship

BAPTIST DIGEST

■ **Calif. Baptists still "Southern."** California Baptists officially will remain "Southern" following action by messengers to the California Southern Baptist Convention. The largest evangelical group in the nation's most populous state rejected for the second straight year a proposal to remove "Southern" from its name. Proponents of the change said the regional connotation hinders evangelism outside the Bible Belt. Opponents countered that changing the name would send a negative message to the Southern Baptist Convention and others. Messengers also voted to affirm recent changes to the SBC's Baptist Faith and Message statement.

■ **New Colorado leader proposed.** Colorado native Mark Edlund will be recommended as the next executive director of the Colorado Baptist General Convention. Edlund currently is a Southern Baptist international missionary to Korea where he helps direct the work of 380 missionaries in the Western Pacific region. If elected at a Jan. 25 special called meeting of the state convention, Edlund will succeed David Bunch, who retired in March.

■ **Texas church shares FAITH.** A Texas Baptist church with more than 1,000 people involved in the FAITH Sunday school evangelism strategy recently was honored by LifeWay

Christian Resources. Sal Sberna, pastor of Metropolitan Baptist Church of Houston, accepted the Washburn-Piland-Taylor Directors Award on behalf of the church. The award is named after A.V. Washburn, Harry Piland and Bill Taylor, the last three men who have provided leadership for Sunday school ministry across the Southern Baptist Convention.

■ **Smyth & Helwys to expand.** Smyth & Helwys Publishing marked its 10th anniversary with plans for two new initiatives. The Georgia-based company will open an office in the Dallas area and develop a new line of children's Sunday school curriculum, said publisher Cecil Staton.

Mission emphasis links doctors in Thailand & Kentucky

By Trennis Henderson
Editor

BARBOURVILLE—Southern Baptist international missionary John Gibson has been practicing medicine in Thailand for 15 years. So what is he doing during his 10-month state-side assignment in Kentucky? Practicing medicine.

Gibson is pioneering an arrangement that allows him to fill in for doctors here in the States while they take turns serving his patients in Thailand. Gibson is working with a group of Christian doctors at Family Life Centers in Barbourville and Corbin. In turn, three physicians are spending three months each at a clinic Gibson runs in northern Thailand.

"This is the first time we've been able to do this," Gibson said. "We're trying to promote it as a way to expand our program and involve Christians here in the States in world missions."

Tom Ashburn, a member of First Baptist Church of Barbourville, is among the doctors participating in the exchange program. Ashburn, a veteran of several medical mission trips to Brazil, Guatemala and Russia, recently returned from his three-month assignment in Thailand.

"We were working in a clinic setting, seeing patients every day," Ashburn said. Noting that "there were very few local doctors in the area where we were," he said the clinic "provides a way for the hill tribe folks to get consistent care."

Ashburn said the most significant part of the program is that it allows the medical ministry to continue. "I had to keep going back to the fact that this place would be closed if I wasn't there," he said, since Gibson currently is the clinic's only staff physician.

Gibson's interest in medical missions dates back more than 20 years, soon after he became a Christian during medical school. He later met his wife, Linda, a nurse anesthetist who had made a commitment to missions at age 12.

After getting married in 1979, the Gibsons went on three overseas medical mission trips during their first year of marriage.

"My call to missions was almost synonymous with my salvation," Gibson recalled. "I knew I owed the Lord everything I had at that point. The more I read the Bible, the more I was convinced that every Christian's responsibility was to serve the Lord."

The Gibsons were appointed as

missionaries to India in 1984. Before they reached the field, however, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated, sparking widespread violence and instability. As a result, the Gibsons' assignment was put on hold and they later were reassigned to Thailand.

"We went to Thailand without a lot of foreknowledge about what was going on," Gibson noted. He said his first major hurdle was discovering that "Thailand requires all foreign-trained doctors to pass a medical exam given in the Thai language."

"We had to depend on the Lord," he said. "It was a miracle that I was able to pass the test. It confirmed that this is where the Lord wanted us."

The Gibsons spent their first several years in Thailand serving at Bangkla Baptist Hospital, where he balanced such diverse roles as chief physician, administrator, surgeon and obstetrician.

In recent years, "we struggled with what our ministry role should be and sensed the Lord was leading us in a different direction," he said. "Our area of central Thailand had really developed economically and a lot of private hospitals had moved in. The need end of it was beginning to diminish."

"We knew there were a lot of places in Thailand that had needs," he added. As a result, they began conducting mobile clinics in a remote area of Thailand near the Laotian border. About two years ago, they established a new

clinic in northern Thailand while continuing to conduct mobile clinics in the region.

Since moving to northern Thailand, the Gibsons have seen a tremendous spiritual response to their ministry efforts.

"I look at medicine as a tool or platform for evangelism," Gibson explained. "My first love is to share the story and see people come into the kingdom." During the past two years, he said, more than 600 Thai and Hmong people in the region have become Christians and about 20 churches and missions have been started.

Citing a "deep sense of contentment" during her years as a missionary to Thailand, Mrs. Gibson said, "To walk into a village and be the first one to carry the gospel message, it doesn't get any better than that."

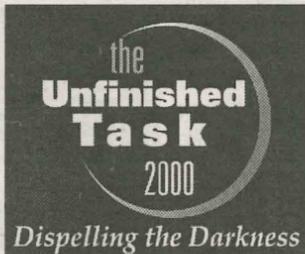
"We pray God-sized prayers," she added. "The battle is won through prayer."

Southern Baptists have an opportunity to join that effort through the 2000 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and annual prayer emphasis for international missions. Even more important, Gibson added, is personal involvement.

"I've become more and more convinced that Southern Baptists have a much greater responsibility than Lottie Moon or Cooperative Program," he said. "The responsibility of reaching the lost around the world is yours. My job now is to get others involved."

"To walk into a village and be the first one to carry the gospel message, it doesn't get any better than that."

Linda Gibson, Southern Baptist missionary to Thailand



KBC group seeing signs of authentic spirituality in Kentucky

Continued from page 1

In the midst of the decline in church growth, many Kentucky Baptists studied "Experiencing God," a Bible study developed by Henry Blackaby, former director of prayer and spiritual awakening at the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board, and Claude King, a consultant and writer for NAMB's office of prayer and spiritual awakening.

The Bible study, published in 1994, challenges Christians to relate to God by knowing, loving, hearing, joining, believing, obeying and experiencing Him. Rather than establishing an agenda and asking God to bless it, "Experiencing God" implores Christians to find out where God already is working and get in step with Him.

"We are seeing a number of people desperately wanting to see God do more," Martin said. He said his group believes that spiritual intimacy leads to a strong conviction that God will act in powerful ways. The key to effective ministry is passionate spirituality.

Martin said he's seeing evidence that people throughout Kentucky are humbly seeking God's will and ways to be a part of it, rather than starting new ministries and asking God to bless them.

Martin said God appears to be answering the prayers of Kentucky Christians with what he calls five "streams" of spiritual movement:

■ **Students.** In the past four years, Baptist Student Unions at several colleges and universities across the commonwealth have outgrown their facilities. Approximately 200 college and high school students made spiritual commitments during a week of serv-

ices held at Cumberland College.

Student ministries have continued growing and show no signs of plateauing, Martin said.

■ **Emphasis on "Experiencing God" weekends.** Martin recounted the story of a woman in Harlan County who prayed five years for a teacher to come and lead a Bible study before volunteers Lonnie and Belinda Riley organized an "Experiencing God" weekend at Lynch Baptist Church. The couple, who are Mission Service Corps volunteers, was overwhelmed when 95 people from various churches, denominations and races showed up, Martin said.

On another front, Kentucky Baptists Frank and Lin Harris in Mayfield led more than 35 "Experiencing God" weekends in Kentucky this year.

■ **Prison ministries.** "Experiencing God" also is used as a part of prison ministries. A May 1999 "prison blitz" resulted in more than 1,000 professions of faith. Lay leaders organized by volunteer Charlie Simmons followed up on the professions by leading inmates through "Experiencing God."

For years, Eileen Mullins had a vision for establishing a hospitality house to serve the families of inmates who would be incarcerated at a new federal prison being built near her home, Martin said. Many families must travel great distances at considerable expense in order to visit loved ones. The hospitality house would give families housing, clothing, food and an opportunity

for Bible study.

Mullins had in mind possible donors for the resources necessary to build and supply the home, but never felt the time was right to contact them. After years of earnest prayer, Mullins awoke on July 4, 1998, with the words "today is the day to call" ringing in her ears, according to Martin. She called the potential donors, and was overjoyed when they donated an acre near the prison entrance. The hospitality house should be ready for families when the prison opens in 2003.

■ **Church planting.** Alan Witham was hired earlier this year by the Kentucky Baptist Convention to help coordinate church planting efforts. According to Martin, 10 new churches recently were begun, and more than 20 other prospective church planters are eagerly seeking to build churches on prayer.

Martin said he believes a congregation built intentionally around prayer will attract people who have been seeking that kind of authentic spiritual relationship.

■ **Prayer movement.** Five years ago, it was difficult to find ongoing prayer groups praying for revival in Kentucky, Martin said. Now he can identify at least 10 throughout the commonwealth. Most of them span denominational lines; all were developed from the grassroots level. The groups, some with members who drive two hours to participate, are praying for revival. Other Kentucky Baptists are connect-

Resources:

- "Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire" by Jim Cymbala.
- "Fresh Faith" by Jim Cymbala.
- "Experiencing God" by Henry Blackaby & Claude King.
- www.freshwindfreshfire.com.

ing with prayer partners around the world through the Internet and e-mail groups.

The cluster group hopes to support these streams of revival and the growth of authentic spirituality by raising awareness throughout Kentucky.

"Prayer is more caught than taught," Martin explained. The KBC will provide forums where participants can experience the power of an intimate relationship with God.

The KBC began hosting quarterly prayer meetings in 1998 at locations around the state. This past summer, one of those meetings was held at the Cane Ridge Meeting House in Bourbon County, the site of the state's largest tent camp revival during the second Great Awakening, Martin said.

Fostering authentic spirituality is key to both church health and personal health. "Impression without expression leads to depression," Martin said. "Many people have a dream, but they don't have a network to plug into, so they are just sitting there frustrated."

Martin said he and the cluster group hopes to help Kentucky Baptists accomplish the vision God has given them through an authentic, optimistic faith that is grounded in the belief that God will act in powerful ways.

What are the KBC's Big 5?

Kentucky Baptist Convention staff have been studying key issues facing churches in the 21st century.

"Cluster groups" have identified five key issues that will affect practically every group. They are:

- Authentic spirituality.
- Intergenerational issues.
- Leadership development.
- Transitions.
- Young adults.

The KBC's goal is to provide information and resources about these issues to better prepare Kentucky Baptist churches to be effective in their ministry.

Next week's Western Recorder will address intergenerational issues. Previous articles from this series are available on the Kentucky Baptist Convention's Web site at www.kybaptist.org.



Issues every church should address

WESTERN RECORDER

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*Earnestly contend for the
faith which was once for
all delivered to the
saints.—Jude 3*

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A fork in the road

I believe the church today is at a fork in the road. Some churches are choosing the road of political correctness, while others are traveling the "straight and narrow."

Apparently some are attempting to travel a road which, in my opinion, doesn't exist, the road of moderation. Read Matthew 7:13-23. We are either for God or against God. There is no in-between.

I view moderates as those who run around oiling squeaky wheels. They try to keep everyone happy. True Christians cannot be lukewarm. They must be strong and take a stand against anti-Bible principles such as the murder of over 4,000 babies each day and not ignore Psalms 139. They also should take a stand against homosexuality and not allow their church leadership to say that Romans 1:18-32 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 are outdated.

Posting of the Ten Commandments in public buildings should be supported by all New Testament churches. Read Matthew 5:17-42. Church members should speak out against those who stand in the pulpit and tear out page after page from the Bible proclaiming that certain "non-politically correct" biblical teachings do not apply in our society today. They are ignoring the biblical truth that God never changes and that His words are as relevant today as they were yesterday. Read Hebrews 13:8, James 1:17 and Isaiah 40:8.

When church leaders support the separation of church and state, they are denying that God is omnipotent and omnipresent. Christians, wake up. Some who call themselves ministers may be working for someone other than the one true God! Read

2 Peter 2, 1 Timothy 4:1-2 and 2 Timothy 3:1-9.

We are witnessing an increase in the belief in God in our world today. The problem with this movement is that Jesus Christ isn't always given His rightful place; therefore, it is becoming anti-Christ. Read John 14:6, 1 John 4:1-6 and 1 John 5:1-13.

Dean Sturgill
London

Jesus is our judge

The continuing disagreement between Baptists, as it relates to the Baptist statement of faith, is proof that this new version, created by the current national leadership, has within it the essence of mandate.

For many Baptist Christians the preservation of the joy and integrity of our faith can be felt when we remember that the ethical reactions in life are to be judged by the truth we see in Christ. This means that anything alien to His Spirit has no authority for us, even if it is in the Bible. Christians should not worship words, not even when those words are found in Scripture. We worship the Living Word who is Christ; and the highest claim that can be made for the Scriptures is that they are the written words which lead us to Him, the Word made flesh.

Not all parts of Scripture reveal Christ to us equally well, for some parts have more of Christ in them than

others. For many of us the Gospel of Mark and Paul's letter to the church in Rome have more authority than the book of Esther, and if some should desire to debate the matter, then tell us when you last opened the book of Esther.

Any attempt to replace the revelation of Christ, aside from the clearly documented examples of His deportment, reactions and teachings, gives one pause. To elevate Scripture as the last venue of revelation, while denigrating what Christ said and did, is to wander into the abyss of religious politics where the attempted control of doctrine takes precedence over truth and all kinds of bias will then be attributed to Scripture

Edward Clark
Danville

Musical challenge

Thank you for Victoria Moon's "Silent Pipes" articles in the Nov. 14 issue of the Western Recorder. We have seen this crisis coming on in the past decade.

Surely there are those with imagination and creativity, as mentioned in Moon's articles, who will discover ways of challenging gifted young people to develop their musical talent in being organists for our churches.

So may it be!

William J. Reynolds
Professor of Church
Music Emeritus
Southwestern Baptist
Theological Seminary
Fort Worth, TX

What are you thinking?

The Western Recorder considers letters on any subject for publication, provided they don't make a personal attack. The maximum length for a letter is 300 words. Baptist Forum is limited to Western Recorder subscribers, unless someone is responding to a story or editorial of which they are the subject. Submit by mail, Box 43969, Louisville, KY 40253; fax, (502) 244-6474; or e-mail, wesrec@ntr.net.

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The longer I serve Kentucky Baptists and the more I listen to pastors, the more convinced I am that "Shepherding the Shepherd" is one of the most significant conferences that Kentucky Baptists provide. The next conference is coming up Jan. 25-27 in Lexington.

Serving as a pastor is one of the most challenging and rewarding professions that I know. The challenge and stress come from producing three sermons each week, caring for individuals in the church and community, providing leadership for multiple ministries and activities, solving problems, counseling, nurturing personal family, managing personal finances and coping with discouragement, criticism and possible rejection. It can be heavy to carry the burdens of so many people, and some pastors break under the load.

However, there are rewards that come with being an authentic and faithful pastor. The pastor gets to share in the lives of people in a very special

way. One of the rewards is seeing the power of God to transform lives and churches.

Having served as a pastor I understand many of the challenges but the struggles that some pastors face are more intense than any I ever experienced. In the past week I have observed the following situations with pastors:

■ A pastor who has resigned without a place to go.

■ A pastor who is under intense pressure to leave his church.

■ A pastor and wife who had overcome a minor stroke and heart surgery while being rejected by some church members.

■ A pastor who traveled hundreds of miles to lovingly conduct the funeral for a very committed lady whom he had not seen in four years.

I also observed young, enthusiastic pastors and staff members who were enjoying rewarding and fruitful ministries but were extremely busy.

It is in this demanding setting that



Bill Mackey

the Shepherding the Shepherd conference offers the ministry couple a break from tasks and family responsibilities in order to focus on personal and spiritual enrichment. It is an opportunity for the couple to experience worship and praise together as husband and wife.

Outstanding presenters and worship leaders have been enlisted for the upcoming conference: Reggie McNeal, a nationally recognized author and speaker; Jay Wolf, pastor of First Baptist Church of Montgomery, Ala.; John Ed Mathison, also of Montgomery, Ala.; and a great worship team.

The KBC could not afford to offer such a dynamic conference without the help of Baptist Healthcare System. Hundreds of pastors and spouses are grateful to Tommy Smith, Baptist Healthcare's CEO, and the six hospital presidents for providing 50 percent of the cost.

As a church leader you could help make it possible for your pastor to attend. For more information contact the KBC leadership development department at (502) 254-4734 or (888) 254-5706.

Bill Mackey is executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention

STEWARDSHIP

Does your church handle finances with integrity?

By Don Spencer

A big mistake of many church leaders is the assumption that they and those around them are above any temptations to mishandle church funds. How often has someone in the church said,

"It could never happen here. All those precautions are just not worth the time and effort." Unfortunately, experience teaches that at some point, most churches must deal with some sticky questions regarding the handling of church finances. Sometimes nothing wrong has been done but the mere suspicion of wrongdoing damages the reputation of leaders.

The only way to protect oneself and others is to ensure financial integrity in the handling of church finances. Richard Bergstrom, in the book "Mastering Church Finances," offers several "tough questions" that should be asked to evaluate the handling of money in your church:

■ Do we make sure the same person is not involved in more than one of the financial procedures of the church? (collecting, counting, recording, authorizing expenses, writing checks, auditing).

■ Do we count and record offerings immediately after received?

■ Are offerings always stored in a secure or well-supervised area?

■ Do we count cash and check twice for accuracy?

■ Do we place offerings in lockbags after counting and place the lockbags in a safe or night depository until the bank opens?

■ Do we strictly limit who has access to the safe?

■ Do we change the safe combination when someone is no longer authorized to use it?

■ Is everyone who is authorized to write checks against the church funds held responsible through an accounting/auditing system?

■ Do we issue annual receipts for giving? This is another check on determining that what comes in has been accounted for.

Painful experiences in too many churches have taught that unless these questions can all be answered with a firm "yes," your church might have a significant hole in the church's financial structure through which hundreds or perhaps thousands of dollars could be lost.

Don Spencer is a certified financial planner and directs the Kentucky Baptist Convention's annuity department



Proper nutrition can help older adults maintain health, energy

Q: My son is giving me grief over my eating habits, which haven't changed in years. I don't understand his concern and he is becoming very persistent. How should I respond?

Eating well is important at any age. Proper nutrition helps us to maintain health and provides the energy required for our daily activities. For some older adults, however, eating balanced, nutritious meals and getting enough of the essential nutrients can be a real challenge. This is true for a number of reasons. For example:

- Family changes such as children growing up and moving away from home or the loss of a spouse can result in having to spend many mealtimes alone. It can be hard to make that extra effort to make sure you have a balanced meal when you are the only one who will eat it.

- Some people become much less active as they get older, particularly after retirement. This can result in a poor appetite.

- The sense of taste and smell may decrease in some older adults. Foods are much less appealing when you can't smell or taste them.

- Prescription medications or health problems can interfere with appetite and the absorption of certain nutrients from food.

- Difficulty with mobility and lack of energy can make it difficult to prepare proper meals or go out for groceries.

In spite of these challenges, it is important that we continue to eat well as we get older. In many cases, this will require a bit more planning, creativity and the willingness to ask for assistance when required.

The book, "Canada's Food Guide for Healthy Eating," is an excellent place to start when it comes to making healthy food choices. Choosing the appropriate number of servings and a variety of foods from the four main food groups (grains, fruits and vegetables, milk and milk products, meat and alternatives) will ensure that you are getting enough of the nutrients you need for health.—*Jon Rainbow*

Q: There is a lot being said today about marriage. Churches also are doing more to support the divorced. I think there is an aching loneliness in the lives of widows that the church is not addressing. Do you agree?

You have expressed a need that represents real pain. In fact, it was the specific need of widows in the early church that led to the apostles' first experience of delegating (Acts 6).

Some churches today assign specific deacons to serve specific widows. The word "deacon" originally meant one who waited on tables as a servant. A ministry to widows certainly is an appropriate task for any church's deacons.

Some churches have a senior adult ministry. Churches minister best with, not just for, senior adults. Senior adults can be divided into ministry teams, with each team regularly visiting widows and others who are homebound. Not only does this alleviate much loneliness, it multiplies the work of senior adults with the time, interest and gifts to make ministry happen.

A church also can reach out to its widows in its programming. Recent widows can be contacted to make sure they are aware of upcoming grief workshops or "recovering from the losses of life" classes. Practical help also can be provided for people coming to terms with a life lived solo. Financial planning, auto repair, cooking—the list is almost endless of ways a church can help support widows' needs.

Brainstorm with your pastor, deacons and peers about how your church and you personally can begin the very biblical and exciting ministry to, with and for widows.—*James Stillwell*

Family Forum writers are David Garrard, minister to children at St. Matthews Baptist Church in Louisville; James Stillwell, minister to singles at Immanuel Baptist Church in Lexington; Jon Rainbow, a clinical gerontologist and professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; and Wade Rowatt, director of the St. Matthews Pastoral Counseling Center in Louisville. Send questions for *Family Forum* to *Western Recorder*, Box 43969, Louisville, KY 40253 or e-mail us at wesrec@ntr.net.



Peace on Earth begins one heart at a time

What was the world's very first Christmas carol? Approximately 2,000 years ago, in a desolate Judean field near Bethlehem, a band of angels proclaimed to a group of stunned shepherds, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

Although Luke 2:13 tells us the heavenly host was praising God and "saying" the words, Christian tradition indicates that their announcement was a musical celebration of Christ's birth. Regardless of the form, the angels' message of "peace on earth" has become a watchword of Christmas celebrations over the centuries.

As the world prepares to observe Christmas 2000, however, peace seems to be an elusive dream. Whether it's the election upheaval here in the United States, mounting political unrest in the Middle East or terrorist attacks and civil wars across the globe, today's world is far from peaceful.

Even in modern Bethlehem, the most historically significant Christmas site on the planet, violence has forced leaders to cancel most of this year's holiday festivities.

"This year, Bethlehem will not be able to celebrate Christmas as planned," Christiane Dabdoub Nasser, head of the Palestinian National Authority's Bethlehem 2000 Project, announced recently. Nasser noted that "the children will not have their gifts, the worshippers will be in mourning and the pilgrims will be absent." Not a pretty picture for observing the birth of the Prince of Peace.

Of course, the absence of peace in our world is nothing new. Nearly 140 years ago, in the midst of the American Civil War, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow penned the words to the famous carol, "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day."

According to William Reynolds in the "Handbook to the Baptist Hymnal," the hymn was written on Christmas Day in 1863, six months after the Battle of Gettysburg claimed 40,000 casualties. Longfellow's own 19-year-old son was wounded in the war a few weeks before Christmas and the poet, who was re-

cently widowed, was caring for his injured son.

"I heard the bells on Christmas day, their old familiar carols play; and wild and sweet the words repeat of peace on earth, good will to men," Longfellow began.

Reflecting on the chaos around him, he added, "And in despair I bowed my head: 'There is no peace on earth,' I said. 'For hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men.'"

But he looked beyond his present circumstances to write the triumphant verse, "Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: 'God is not dead, not doth He sleep; the wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with peace on earth, good will to men.'"

Rather than pursuing peace, however, it seems easier to just ignore the world's troubles and pretend that all is well. Yet God warned in Jeremiah 6:14 about falsely proclaiming, "Peace, peace; when there is no peace."

Our role as Christians is not to merely hope for peace, but to actively become peacemakers. While world peace is an over-

whelming goal for anyone to pursue, we each can make a difference within our spheres of influence. Seeking to promote spiritual peace among one's family, friends and co-workers is far more important than picking out the perfect gift for everyone on your Christmas list or buying a just-right outfit for one more holiday party.

Even amid the hustle and hassle of the holiday season, Christians have the privilege of knowing that "Christ Jesus ... is our peace" (Ephesians 2:13-14). Regardless of political turmoil at home and abroad, we can find comfort and hope in a personal relationship with Jesus that provides eternal peace amid life's storms.

As Christmas 2000 approaches, what is our role as followers of Christ? According to the words of another familiar chorus, our responsibility is clear: "Let there be peace on earth—and let it begin with me."

STRAIGHT FROM THE EDITOR



Trennis Henderson

Holiday ministry can make lasting impact

By Dan Ferguson

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son" (John 3:16a).

In the United States today, a new millionaire is made every few minutes.

A quick study of our nation's history would reveal that you and I are living in times of wealth and prosperity unknown to any previous generation of Americans. Instead of budget deficits, we are enjoying days of record surpluses. Many Americans have adopted the "eat, drink and be merry" attitude toward life made famous by the rich farmer of Luke 12.

Yet all around us, many people live in want and feel disenfranchised from the blessings of the "American dream" that many of us take for granted. Many folks who live in your community and mine will find no "peace on earth, good will toward men" this Christmas season because they lack the basic needs of shelter, food and clothing.

The lack of basic necessities becomes even more poignant and painful during the Christmas season. These

needs provide Christians and churches with real opportunities to do ministry that will impact the lives of people for Christ and His kingdom.

It is important for concerned Christians to remember that most of the people who have needs during the holidays struggle with these same needs throughout the year. It is imperative to begin ministries and be involved in ministries that not only touch the lives of people during the holidays, but that touch the lives of people in an ongoing way.

One ministry that many churches are involved in during the Christmas season is gathering and distributing food baskets for those in need. This holiday effort can become an ongoing ministry as individual congregations or churches within an association establish a food pantry that stocks non-perishable food items and distributes them to those in need throughout the year.

Many churches also adopt families at Christmas and provide them with much-needed clothing. This holiday effort also can become an ongoing ministry as churches and associations establish a permanent clothes closet that

is stocked with clothing for those in need throughout the year.

There are a variety of ongoing ministries that Christians and churches can plug into during the Christmas season. "Operation Christmas Child" through Samaritan's Purse and the Prison Fellowship Angel Tree Project are two such ministries. "Room at the Inn" is a ministry in which some churches open their facilities to feed and lodge the homeless during the Christmas season and throughout the harsh winter months. Individuals and church groups can volunteer to provide food, serve meals and conduct worship services through agencies such as the Salvation Army. Churches also can assemble and deliver gift packs to local jails, mental health facilities and nursing homes.

There are countless ministry opportunities during the Christmas season. In a world often motivated by individual selfishness, the Christmas season seems to bring out the best in individual sharing and giving. May each gift we give this Christmas and each ministry we share this season be an expression of our love for others. In doing so, we live out the true meaning of the season which is summed up in the words of John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son. ..."

Dan Ferguson is pastor of Second Baptist Church in Hopkinsville.



CHRISTMAS

Kentucky Baptists take Christmas spirit to those in need

"Anyone can give away a chicken or a turkey, or clothe a child; it's harder to find help burying a family member."

Lincoln Bingham, pastor of St. Paul's Missionary Baptist Church in Louisville and black church liaison for the Kentucky Baptist Convention

Continued from page 1

sleeping on concrete floors and, when ill, taking medications meant for the horses because they can't afford proper medical care, Roberts said. At Christmas time, she organizes a party for the workers and their families to meet physical and spiritual needs.

"Many of these children and families wouldn't have a Christmas at all if it wasn't for this party," she said. "Many of these people only have this party to make them feel part of a community and give them a place they feel they belong."

Besides the gifts and the food, which is supplied by Kentucky Baptist Woman's Missionary Union and area churches, Roberts joins with the track's chaplain and priest to assemble a nativity scene, telling the partygoers about Christ's birth.

"So many of these people have never even heard of Jesus, and they are starving from a spiritual hunger. You can see the hurt and pain in their eyes," she said. "They aren't the sort of people who are going to walk into a church. They don't feel worthy enough because of their rough lifestyle, or don't think they're dressed right. Some of them are mentally challenged. But they need TLC, too, and this ministry is a way to care for our brothers and sisters the way God wants us to care."

■ *Falling through the cracks.* Lincoln Bingham, pastor of St. Paul's Missionary Baptist Church of Louisville and black church liaison for the KBC, sees a different but equally press-

ing need in his community at Christmas time.

"We are located in the 40203 zip code area, and here 89.9 percent of the people live in poverty," he said.

Noting that when the physical needs of people are met, their spiritual needs can be better addressed, he and his congregation are offering Christmas baskets and Christmas gifts along with the annual Christmas cantata this year.

"We are expanding our ministries to offer gifts to all the families and children at the Wayside Christian Center, Lyndon Lane Nursing Home and female inmates who come to the chapel services at PeeWee Valley," the Kentucky correctional institution for women, he said.

Due to the staggering poverty level in his community, Bingham has learned that he can't assume what people will need during the holidays or at any other time when they come to his church.

"Recently we lost a member of our church and the family couldn't afford the burial, so we came up with the money to help them do that. In another case, we gave \$800 to someone who needed medication and couldn't pay for it.

"There are a lot of good agencies out there to help these folks, and we don't duplicate services," Bingham said. "But anyone can give away a chicken or a turkey, or clothe a child; it's harder to find help burying a family member. We try to meet the needs that fall through the cracks, those not met by other agencies."

Will we reach this generation?

From time to time in my column and frequently when I speak in churches across the state I intentionally and passionately restate our commitment to youth ministry at Jonathan Creek and Cedarmore.

I am quick to add that we strive very hard to serve all ages, from the younger to the older and those in between. But I will admit to anyone who asks that I have an almost overwhelming burden for reaching this generation of youth. Thus, many of our efforts at Jonathan Creek and Cedarmore are focused toward this end.

The most recent statistics I have heard indicate that 88 percent of this youth generation is unchurched! I know many people find this number hard to fathom, but we must guard against the tendency to view such statistics through only our own experience. Because we go to church, and most of us very actively so, most of our kids go to church as well. So for many people, it is almost beyond comprehension that nearly nine out of 10 youth are not in church on any Sunday.

What an opportunity. What a need. Can you imagine the size of this potential harvest? Ponder for a moment: Since many of you reading this are my age (51) or older,

what it would be like to grow up in a society in which only 10 percent of the population was Christian.

There is a movement taking place throughout this state in student evangelism. Our high school campuses are more open than they have been in years. And our state convention is making a concentrated effort to seize this window of opportunity.

KENTUCKY BAPTIST ASSEMBLIES



Rusty Ellison

Kentucky Baptist Convention youth evangelism specialist Randy Record is on fire for the Lord. KBC evangelism growth team leader Dan Garland is strongly committed to this area of evangelism. So is KBC Executive Director Bill Mackey. Our summer camps, led at Cedarmore by Tom Smoot and at Jonathan Creek by Ron Tipton and Jason Eller-

brook, provide an environment for student evangelism. But we can't get it done in eight weeks of camp. We can help, encourage, reinforce and exhort, but the battle is fought at the high school campus. Will we step up and seize the day that God is giving us to reach this generation?

Rusty Ellison is president of Kentucky Baptist Assemblies, Box 37, Bagdad, KY 40003. Call (502) 747-8911

■ *Lots of toys.* Sandra Williams, director of church and community ministries for Elkhorn Baptist Association in Lexington, noted that area churches have been giving of their time and money to bring a little Christmas to low-income and homeless families in that area.

"We have our Christmas toy project, where churches donate brand new toys to us and we set up a toy store for parents to come in and purchase the toys at one-tenth of the cost of the toy," she said.

The program, which she said empowers parents to take care of their families at Christmas, requires families to register ahead of time. In the first year of the program, 125 children registered and 85 volunteers came out to assist with the Christmas toy project. This year, 777 children have registered and more than 400 volunteers are expected.

Besides the toys, families will receive free Bibles, coloring books,

handmade Christmas stockings filled with treats and health kits containing basic personal hygiene items such as soap and toothpaste. "We had one lady who made 700 cloth stockings for the children by herself," Williams said.

The toy store will be held at three locations in Lexington, one in Paris and one in Georgetown, Dec. 12, 14 and 16.

■ *Giving and receiving at Genesis House.* In Mayfield, Cadiz Baptist Church made tote bags filled with gifts for each of the 15 female residents of Genesis House. Sharon Baptist Church is throwing the girls a holiday party and Graves County Baptist Association sponsored a "store" for the girls to select gently-used and new items as presents for their family members.

The Genesis House residents also are getting into the Christmas spirit with a visit to Heritage Manor Healthcare Center in Mayfield. The girls will sing carols and distribute gifts to the elderly residents of the center.

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CHRISTMAS

Ministries welcome Christmas spirit all year

By Victoria Moon
Staff Writer

MAYFIELD—The spirit of giving normally associated with Christmas opens the hearts and pocketbooks of many people during the season.

But volunteers and mission center directors throughout the commonwealth urge people to remember that the physical and spiritual needs of the poor are year round.

"There are so many needs that people don't even realize exist, and these are needs that need to be met," said Lisa McClain, activities coordinator for Genesis Home, a residence facility of the Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children.

Anita Roberts, volunteer ministry coordinator for Turfway race track in Florence, noted that the period immediately after Christmas often is the hardest for back side workers at the track.

"The winter months are the worst for the workers, from Thanksgiving to early March," she said. "We go through a mega amount of sleeping bags and blankets because very often the workers are sleeping on the concrete floor of a concrete block room."

She also cited needs that easily can be overlooked by those outside the ministry.

"Every person who works with the ministry on the track has to be licensed, and we can spend \$100 or more a year just on that," she said.

Kathy Strange, director of the Answer Center in Henderson, said that the



GIFT TIME Girls at the Kentucky Baptist Home for Children's Genesis Home look at presents donated for Christmas. Ministry leaders say that while such gifts are welcome, needs exist year round.

ministry center always is in need of volunteers. While she sees financial donations on the rise during the Christmas season, she struggles with finding enough volunteers.

"Some of our first-string volunteers are starting to get burned out, and we are looking to recruit some from our second string," she said.

"One of my greatest challenges here is keeping our volunteer base steady," she added. "We get more calls about funding at Christmas because people are looking at the bottom line on their income taxes and their hearts are tender during the Christmas season. But giving their time seems to be a real challenge."

Other ministries, like Elkhorn Baptist Association's ministry to the poor and homeless in the Lexington area, find it difficult to meet volunteer and financial needs in the summer months.

"The easiest time for us is Christ-

mas time," said Sandra Williams, director of church and community ministries for the association, "but it's more difficult in the summertime when families are on vacation."

"The spirit of Christmas overflows at this time, and we are so grateful for that," said McClain, "but we still need help, still need to carry on the rest of the year."

Each of the ministry leaders shared their own "Christmas wish lists" for not just this season, but every month of the year.

■ Turfway race track's ministry is in dire need of sleeping bags, blankets, hats, scarves and gloves, Roberts said. They also are in need of regular financial support, pop-top canned goods, personal hygiene items other than mouthwash and the Jesus video in both English and Spanish.

■ The Genesis House regularly needs prayer support, financial support and regular monthly volunteers who will visit and plan recreational activities with the residents, McClain said.

■ The Answer Center, a multi-faceted ministry to low-income families, is in need of financial support and volunteers, Strange said.

■ Elkhorn Baptist Association's ministries are in regular need of volunteers, gently used and new clothing, sheets, blankets and household utensils, Williams said. The ministry also needs gloves, hats, socks and scarves for their sock and mitten tree and supplies for their weekly "Feed the Hungry" program that offers brown-bag lunches to anyone who asks.

Scholar: Gold, frankincense & myrrh were gifts fit for a king

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (ABP)—Gifts that the Bible says the wise men brought to the baby Jesus were fit for a king, according to a professor at Wake Forest University.

Gold, frankincense and myrrh were traditional gifts given in antiquity to royalty in the Middle East, said Fred Horton, a Bible professor at the school in Winston-Salem, N.C. "Most Palestinian Jews of the first century would have been unable to afford such gifts."

Their mention in the story of Jesus' birth in Matthew indicates that Christ was to be revered as a king not only by Jews but by Gentiles as well, he said.

Gold frequently is mentioned as a gift for kings in the Old Testament. While less valued today, frankincense and myrrh, fragrant gum resins extracted from trees in south Arabia and Ethiopia, were used during Jesus' time to make fine perfumes and anointing oils.

"Oils were used extensively in the Middle East to restore moisture after bathing and to protect skin from the dangerous rays of the Middle Eastern sun," Horton said.

Sweet-smelling frankincense also had religious importance. It was one ingredient in incense that was burned in the Jewish Temple and other holy sites.

Myrrh was more rare in the ancient world but valued for perceived curative powers.

More is known about the gifts than their mysterious bearers described as the Wise Men or Magi.

Horton said that while the Gospel of Matthew tells little about the Magi, "we do know something about Magi in the ancient world, however. Often the word 'Magi' refers to wandering Mithraic priests."

Matthew's mention of the ancient religious group is no accident, Horton added. "The author makes it clear that the birth of Jesus was an event not just for the Jews but for the whole world."

Joy

By Robert Dunston

Melody Nazworth, daughter of Dan and Susan Nazworth of Williamsburg, wrote this week's advent devotional concerning joy.

Nazworth is a junior at Cumberland College pursuing a major in history. She sings in the Cumberland College Chorale as well.

Nazworth's parents both work at Cumberland College. Her father is professor of theatre arts and her mother works in the financial planning office.

"We live in a society bent on pleasure and quick fixes. As much as we as Christians try, it's hard not to be sucked into those ideas. We confuse pleasure with happiness and what feels good with joy.

"So when was the last time you felt joy? Real, honest joy that sends a shiver down your spine. A rush of delight that puts a smile on your face and lightens your heart.

"I have always found joy in the simple things. It's in the wind on a crisp morning that carries the smell of earth and grass on it. It's in laughing with a friend for no other reason than the sheer enjoyment of it.

"It's in hearing a beautiful

piece of music, seeing a glorious sunset. It's in a feeling that we modern humans, so wrapped up in our material concerns and fast-paced lives, seldom understand anymore.

It's in the marveling wonder of a child that we exist at all. And even better, that we know Who made us.

CUMBERLAND COLLEGE



"When God created the universe, on each day, He looked at what He had made and saw that it was good. He took, and takes, joy in His creation, and in us. And we should take joy with Him.

"As we prepare for this Advent, don't forget to be joyful in the coming of Christ. Wait with bated breath, like a child waiting for the first flake of snow. And don't forget to smile."

Robert Dunston is chairman of the religion department at Cumberland College, 6000 College Station Dr., Williamsburg, KY 40769

Be someone who 'gets it'

Other than the Grinch and Ebenezer Scrooge, I haven't heard of too many folks who don't like Christmas. I always ponder when I hear someone say "I love Christmas!" Are there people who don't?

Certainly unbelievers don't have the perspective that Christians do. It's sad to think of so many people running full-tilt through the holiday, buying gifts, hosting parties, sending cards, risking life and limb to drape lights on every gutter, shutter and shrub and on and on and on and never getting the point.

The celebration of Christ's birth always has special significance to me because Dec. 25 is my birthday, too. And this year comes a milestone for me, a half-century milestone that I'm not entirely sure I want to spend

First, I'm glad I was born at a time when I can experience a new millennium. It's an exciting time to be alive. It's also an exciting time to be a Christian and a Southern Baptist. We are reaching so many peo-

ple with the gospel and have within our grasp the possibility of reaching the globe with the good news of Jesus Christ in the not-too-distant future. That's very exciting.

Second, I'm glad I have parents who have prayed for me since that Christmas Day in 1950. Third, I'm blessed to be part of this ministry. As I see Christmas gifts from you stacking up in our offices to be distributed to our kids in the next few weeks, I thank God for the commitment and love you have shown our children and families over the years.

I'm grateful for my family and friends. Most of all, I'm grateful that I "get it." I know why I love Christmas, because God loves me and He loves you too. I pray we all will make the most of this season to reflect the truth behind this holiday, this holy day. Perhaps a person who crosses your path who began the season without understanding its real meaning will come to know Him before the new year. What better gift could there be?

Bill Smithwick is president of Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children, 10801 Shelbyville Road, Middletown, KY 40243. Call (800) 456-1386. KBHC's Internet address is: <http://www.iglou.com/kbhc/>

HOMES FOR CHILDREN



Bill Smithwick

Former missionary: Past work affects current calling

Seminary threats continue

HOPKINSVILLE—The Baptist seminary at Kaduna, Nigeria, and the people who work there, are in danger and in need of prayer, Charles Hedrick said.

Hedrick saw radical Muslims attack the seminary three times while he served there as president.

Each time they were rebuffed, but last February, more than 5,000 rioters destroyed the seminary, killing 11 people as part of a four-day riot that left dozens dead and 17 churches and 13 pastors' homes destroyed.

School officials are trying to rebuild so current students can graduate, Hedrick said. Later, officials likely will try to move the school to a safer location, he said. While he was there, the school had 265 full-time students in five levels of programs.

The February riots broke out as Christians protested Muslim activist appeals to institute Islamic criminal law in the northern state of Kaduna. Hundreds of people were killed in the attacks. Mosques, churches and businesses were burned.

The estimated cost of replacing seminary buildings runs as high as \$5.3 million. That doesn't include the cost of replacing school furnishings, including the library books, which had just reached the total of 10,000 volumes required for accreditation.

Hedrick requested prayer for D'Anna Shotts, the seminary librarian and currently the only Southern Baptist missionary at the seminary. "Many of us are concerned about her being there alone," he said.

Concerns have been heightened in recent weeks as officials look to rebuild the seminary. Rumors and threats persist that Muslim activists will return to "finish the job completely," Hedrick said.

Continued from page 1

He had traveled abroad for both the Southern Baptist International Mission Board and for a Kentucky Baptist partnership mission trip before he said he felt called to enter full-time missionary work.

His wife, Carrie, didn't take much convincing, having surrendered to missions at age 13 during a church camp experience. "As she says, it took her a long time to get me ready to go," Hedrick said.

Language school was a major challenge while preparing for the mission field, he said, but even harsher challenges waited in Nigeria.

Once while driving, the Hedricks were shot at by armed robbers dressed as soldiers.

Hedrick said it was his wife who realized the men motioning for them to stop were not with the military. Hedrick said he speeded up and drove past the impostors. The men shot at the car, but the Hedricks' vehicle wasn't struck.

On another occasion, robbers approached Hedrick when he was alone on the side of the car with a flat tire. Bandits often cruise the roads looking for stranded or isolated people who can't flee, he added.

The robbers took everything he had and led him a mile into the wilderness away from the road. Hedrick said he

expected to be shot and left for dead.

"There were four of them, and the leader said, 'Leave him alone,'" Hedrick recalled. "They told me to stay there for 15 minutes, and I did."

While in Nigeria, Hedrick served as a church growth consultant and later as president of the Baptist seminary. "Besides serving in those capacities, we also had a strong ministry with an unreached people group," he said.

Most weekends found the Hedricks "out in the bush" with Nigerian pastors and missionaries working to reach the Fulani people group.

"We would go out and work with them on the weekends, and we had a number of converts from Islam," he recalled. "A lot of these who were converted were persecuted severely and still are being."

Particularly in northern Nigeria, Hedrick said, cycles of violence would break out every two or three years in which radical Muslims would attack Christians and churches.

"While we were at the seminary, we went through three Muslim riots against the seminary," he recalled. "In the last five to six years, it's really become a widespread battle between Christian and Muslims."

"Most Africans, particularly in Nigeria, have this revenge attitude," he added. "We had to deal with that attitude even among Christians."

On July 1, 1999, he retired from the IMB and returned to Kentucky. He said he expected to work with a ministry or school and didn't plan to be leading a local church. Just as in Nigeria, how-

Interested?

For people interested in becoming missionaries, Charles Hedrick recommends that they first seek prayer and then seek out other missionaries to talk to.

"Talk to people with experience in the field," particularly in areas of interest, he said. That will give prospective missionaries a more realistic view of what to expect, he said.

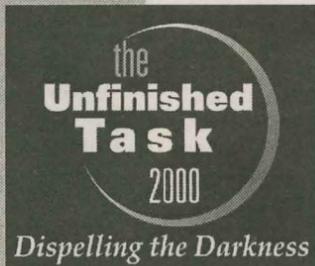
"It took me a long time to be sure I understood and wasn't getting caught up" in the emotion of the decision, he added.

"It's the most difficult thing you'll ever do in your life," he said. "But it's the most enjoyable thing you'll ever do if you're in God's will."

ever, the sense of God's call dictated where he would live and work, he said.

Hedrick said his missionary experience not only deepened his family's vision and compassion for people without a relationship with Christ, it also drives him to help his church share that vision and to involve members in evangelism and church growth efforts.

"I give a lot stronger emphasis to missions and evangelism than I did prior to going to the field," he said. "It just gives you a deeper perspective of the lostness of people and people in spiritual darkness."



A big weekend and our first big snow

A dozen or so times a day, someone will come to my office door, knock and ask if I am busy. I try to not laugh, and I usually say, "No, I'm not busy. What can I do for you?" The reality is that seemingly, even when we are not supposed to be busy, we really are.

For example, last Friday morning our Beta Club boarded a bus to attend the state convention in Louisville. Our students enjoy this annual event, and I did not want to dampen their excitement with predictions of several inches of snow for the weekend.

Later that afternoon, our boys' basketball team boarded two buses for an overnight trip to Anderson County. Again, I was concerned about the weather, but knew they would not have to face that problem until Saturday evening when they were to return home.

On Friday evening, we hosted the annual Booneville-Irvine Association Christmas banquet. The first Friday in December has been set aside for pastors, wives and church members to join us as our special guests for a fine meal in our school's dining room.

Very early Saturday morning, our wrestling team left for a trip to Martin County. I decided to let them leave, though the approaching snow storm and the mountains in Martin County were major concerns to me.

All day Saturday the predictions of snow grew worse. Our Future Farmers of America, cheerleaders and band were in the annual county Christmas parade with two floats Saturday afternoon. I was a little less concerned about these students, since they would not be as far from home. While it did snow on the parade and it was a little cold, the event went off well and our students won an award for the best

float in the youth division.

Saturday evening, another annual event took place on our campus. The Baptist Women have a banquet for our many international students. The women prepare meals more typical of the meals these students would eat in their native countries. We are proud to have students from Brazil, Ethiopia, Liberia, Japan, Bosnia, Vietnam, Thailand, Honduras, Venezuela, South Africa, China, Zambia and Saudi Arabia. The students always enjoy the meal. Each year we do something special. This year we asked the students questions about their native countries, like: "What toys did you play with as a child?" "What are the houses built of in your country?"

By the time the banquet was over, the snow really was coming down. For several of our international students, this was the first snow they had ever seen and touched. I was becoming more worried about our students who still were traveling. Finally, the wrestling team arrived with little trouble. My big concern was the basketball team.

A little after 11 p.m. the phone rang and it was the basketball coach. They had been driving two hours in heavy snow, but felt they could not travel safely any farther. They had gotten off at Mt. Vernon and had secured rooms in a motel. I was relieved that they were safely off the road for the night.

Our Sunday morning choir trip had to be canceled because of snow- and ice-covered roads. The basketball team made its way back to campus later Sunday morning after the roads were cleared.

W.F. Underwood is president of Oneida Baptist Institute, P.O. Box 67, Oneida, KY 40972. www.oneidaschool.org; e-mail: president@oneidaschool.org

THIS IS ONEIDA



W.F. Underwood

Clear Creek alumni in the Niger Republic

Increased motivation to support the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions recently came in the chapel presentation of 1979 alumni Wayne and Gayle Gullion, missionaries to the Niger Republic.

Gullion returned to school and completed the bachelor of arts degree in 1997. The Southern Baptist International Mission Board appointed them soon after graduation. The Niger Republic is the second poorest country in the world. Four-tenths of 1 percent of the population consider themselves to be Christians.

The Gullions' concrete block home is the only one in the village of Gote. Their outreach to the Songhai people group has seen 200 people acknowledge Christ as Savior and 10 churches started. The 3 million Songhai people live throughout three or four countries. Yet only two missionary couples work with the Songhai.

Mrs. Gullion stated, "I was a country woman in Kentucky, and now I'm a bush woman in Africa. The Songhai rarely see a white woman. Culturally women have little status; donkeys are more important than women. I accompany Wayne and sit with the women in

the churches.

"Through my presence, love for the people and work with children, I help encourage the women and lead them to Christ," she said. "We also do literacy work and show the 'Jesus' video. Through Bible clubs we teach children the alphabet and Bible stories. I often hear the women, as they pound out the millet, singing the chorus we teach the children, 'Follow, follow, I will follow Jesus.'"

Work with children has a special urgency because starvation results in the death of 10 to 15 children each day. "Poverty in Niger means not having food to sustain life," Gullion stated.

"A 72-year-old man brought me a silver spoon and stated, 'I have a treasure to sell because my family needs food.' His children were too weak to play.

"Southern Baptist hunger funds supplied grain to 6,000 families. The people are unaccustomed to a gift without any expectation of return and this often opens the door for the gospel."

Bill Whittaker is president of Clear Creek Baptist Bible College, Pineville, KY 40977

CLEAR CREEK CHRONICLE



Bill Whittaker

Evangelicals, Catholics call for strengthening marriages

WASHINGTON (RNS)—In a rare joint statement, evangelical religious leaders have joined with Roman Catholic Church officials to voice their concern on the state of marriage in America and the need for churches to do more to support couples and to help reduce the divorce rate.

"Of all groups, we are convinced that Christians should be speaking out about marriage and establishing an understanding of what it is so that we can, by God's grace, transform the culture and reverse the trend of rising divorces in the country," Bishop Kevin Mannoia, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, told a recent news conference at which the statement was released.

The joint statement, "A Christian Declaration on Marriage," was the result of a task force Mannoia first convened early this year with officials of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, the National Council of Churches and the Southern Baptist Convention.

"Our nation is threatened by a high divorce rate, a rise in cohabitation, a rise in non-marital births, a decline in the marriage rate, and a diminishing interest in and readiness for marrying, especially among young people," the two-page declaration says.

"Therefore, as church leaders, we recognize an unprecedented need and responsibility to help couples begin, build, and sustain better marriages and to restore those threatened by divorce."

In addition to Mannoia, the declaration initially was signed by Bishop Anthony O'Connell, chairman of the Catholic bishops' Committee on Marriage and Family Life; Bob Edgar, general secretary of the National Council of Churches; and Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.

Edgar later withdrew his support, saying he feared the statement might

be used "as a pretext for attacks on gay and lesbian persons."

Mannoia said those organizing the declaration will call on congregations in their faith groups to make dealing with marital issues a higher priority and will encourage partnering with clergy of other faiths on the community level.

The religious leaders also said they hope to plan a "marriage summit" for bishops and other denominational leaders, but no time and date has been determined.

Although the chief endorsers said the statement was designed to speak for heterosexual marriage rather than to specifically oppose same-sex unions, Land said: "We certainly don't shy away from asserting that God ordained marriage and that God ordained marriage as between a man and a woman. It is a covenantal, lifetime relationship between one man and one woman, not between two people of the same sex."

He also said he was concerned that he is a "statistical oddity" because he has been married close to 29 1/2 years to the same woman.

The declaration, noting that clergy officiate at three-quarters of weddings, calls for churches to offer practical resources to enhance marriage and prevent divorce. It asks churches to encourage marriage, educate young people about the responsibilities of marriage, prepare engaged couples, offer pastoral care to couples "at all stages of their relationship," and help couples facing marital problems.

Mannoia said the marriage declaration is the first manifestation of his goal to help his evangelical organization cooperate with others on key issues of concern that cross denominations.

"This is a major, major issue that we think is important and I think what you're seeing is the effort on the part of NAE to work together with other groups," he said.

Finances could force Focus on the Family to cut back projects

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (RNS)—The influential evangelical Christian group Focus on the Family has put several "vital" projects on hold and asked its supporters to step up donations because of an unexpected four-month lull in fund raising.

Ministry President James Dobson took the unusual step of asking for more money in his most recent monthly mailing, sent in November to 2.4 million supporters. The ministry says it doesn't know why it suffered the downturn.

The programs in limbo—described by Dobson as vital—include development of a more interactive Web site, an abstinence education initiative, a video on parenting and an Arabic translation of publications, said Tom Minnery, vice president of public policy at Focus on the Family. Those programs, all of which are new or growing, either will be scaled down or eliminated if the deficit isn't made up by Jan. 15, Minnery said.

"Whatever God chooses to do with

this place, we'll do," Minnery said. "But there's not an undue concern here. When we've been down in the past, people have said, 'Let us know.' So we've done that."

Like many Christian nonprofits, Focus on the Family relies entirely on donations to meet its \$135 million budget. The ministry's income was \$30.8 million June through September, shy of its \$31.3 million projection, Minnery said. That deficit may not seem large, but it's a concern because the ministry runs on only two to four weeks of reserves, Minnery said.

The decline happened before two incidents potentially damaging to fund raising: Mike Trout, a Focus on the Family senior vice president and radio co-host, resigned in October after admitting to an extramarital relationship. John Paulk, a self-described former homosexual, kept his job but has taken a lower profile after he apologized for visiting a Washington, D.C., gay bar during a business trip in September.

NATIONAL NOTES

■ **Study: Minorities better at charity.** African-Americans and Hispanics are more likely to contribute to charity than whites, but are asked to do so less often than their white counterparts, according to new national reports. "If solicitations serve to increase giving, then organizations are overlooking an important resource by not soliciting donations from African-Americans and Hispanics at great rates," states a report from the White House Council of Economic Advisers. It agreed with the conclusion of a report by the Ford Foundation, the Council on Foundations, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation that non-white donors most often "give large gifts primarily to organizations they know and trust."

■ **Prayer meeting results in lawsuit.** A Connecticut couple has sued the zoning commission in the town of New Milford for prohibiting them from holding prayer meetings in their home. As many as 25 people attend the weekly gatherings of Robert and Mary Murphy. After receiving complaints about traffic from neighbors, New Milford's zoning enforcement officer sent letter to the couple stating that the meetings and "the use of a rear yard as a parking lot for attendees" weren't permitted at single-family residences in the town. The Murphys, who are Catholic, sued, stating their constitutional rights of free speech, peaceable assembly, privacy and free exercise of religion have been violated.

■ **New York schools break with Boy Scouts.** The nation's largest public school system has severed ties with the Boy Scouts of America, complaining that the Scouts discriminates against homosexuals. According to the new policy, city schools and educators no longer can sponsor troops or recruit scouts during school hours on school property. Scouts also will be barred from all facilities except those mandated by federal law. The New York school system is the latest institution to take action against the Scouts since the U.S. Supreme Court, in a 5-4 decision last June, upheld the organization's policy of excluding homosexuals.

■ **Duke chapel to allow gay unions.** Duke University will permit the celebration of same-sex unions in Duke Chapel, top administrators announced Dec. 5. While the United Methodist Church, with which Duke is affiliated, does not permit such unions, the school's president and dean said the chapel is not tied to any particular denomination. The Duke policy opens the chapel for same-sex ceremonies only for alumni, students, faculty, employees and their adult children.

■ **Church arsonist gets 42 years.** A man who pleaded guilty to setting fires at more than two dozen churches was sentenced in federal court recently to 42 years in prison. Jay Scott Ballinger, 38, of Yorktown, Ind., must also pay \$3.6 million in restitution for the church burnings, which took place during the 1990s. Ballinger, who is white, has confessed to setting fires at both white and black churches in Kentucky, Indiana, Alabama, Tennessee, California, Ohio, Indiana, Mississippi and South Carolina.

■ **Post offices to issue Eid-al-Fitr stamp.** The U.S. Postal Service last month unveiled a stamp commemorating the Muslim holiday of Eid-al-Fitr, a feast that marks the end of fasting for the holy

month of Ramadan. The stamp also commemorates Eid al-Adha, which marks the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. The holidays join Thanksgiving and Christmas as the only ones honored with commemorative stamps for the year 2001. The stamp will be available in October 2001, just before the start of Ramadan.

■ **Do Methodists have identity crisis?** The United Methodist Church, with its flaming cross logo, is one of the most recognizable Protestant denominations, but a new survey says most people have only a "soft" impression about who United Methodists are. The study of 432 people between the ages of 25 and 54 found most respondents liked what the church had to offer, but few had thought to look seriously at the United Methodist Church. Steve Horswill-Johnston, a church staffer in charge of the denomination's Igniting Ministries campaign, said the survey shows the need for increased advertising. "Folk drive by our churches all the time and do not know what it is."

■ **Adventists, evangelicals plan dialogue.** The Seventh-day Adventist Church and a group of evangelical Christians are planning a series of talks to "move beyond false stereotypes" and find common ground between the two theologically conservative groups. Seventh-day Adventists plan to meet in September 2001, with the World Evangelical Fellowship, an umbrella organization representing 160 million Christians in 111 countries. Both sides agree there are no plans to find agreement on issues of theology or doctrine, but rather to better understand each side's historical understanding of the Christian faith.

■ **\$17 million promised for Israel.** A Chicago-based Orthodox rabbi has given \$3 million to help Jewish organizations in Israel and has promised \$14 million more next year as he leads "solidarity" groups of Christians to the embattled Holy Land. Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, founder and president of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, presented the \$3 million check to Keren Hayesod, one of Israel's largest refugee servicing centers, during a trip in October. Eckstein is leading a second trip to the Middle East and was scheduled to arrive last week in Israel. Eckstein, who says he is committed to building bridges between the Christian and Jewish communities, said U.S. Christians need to stand with Israel.

■ **Congressional chaplains honored.** The Washington National Cathedral has designated "perpetual seats of honor" for the chaplains of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. An interfaith service was held Nov. 15 to recognize the chaplaincies now held by Lloyd Ogilvie, Senate chaplain, and Daniel Coughlin, House chaplain. Ogilvie, a former Presbyterian Church (USA) pastor, said he felt "profound gratitude" for the recognition and said the ceremony was an "affirmation of the kind of work that we try to do."

■ **Needed: Pastors in Alaska.** The United Methodist Church is in dire need of pastors for its 28 congregations in Alaska. Because the state is one of three "missionary conferences" in the 8.4 million-member church, pastors who serve there come from other church conferences. Church leaders in Alaska say there are few, if any, of the 4,000 church members in the state who enter the pastorate.

PRAYER PARTNERS

Please pray for these people and projects, which are part of Kentucky Baptists' partnership with Baptists in Poland, Tanzania and New England:

■ Walter Jackson, church planter and pastor of Towerhill Chapel in Lawrence, Mass., as he leads the congregation to reach the lower-income community.

■ Thank God for the new place of worship for Javea International Baptist Church in Javea-Denia, Spain. The church recently began meeting at Xabia International College, about five minutes from its previous meeting place, Pedro's Bar.

■ Norman and Gunita Harrell and the two missions they began Dec. 3 in Lagos, Portugal, a city of about 20,000 people. One mission serves English-speaking people; the other, Portuguese-speaking people.

■ International Baptist Church in Sofia, Bulgaria, which recently celebrated its fifth anniversary.

■ The people in the Tanzanian communities of Luale, Nyandila and Mgeta, that God will prepare their hearts to receive the gospel.

Mountains to the Mississippi

Compiled by Shirley Wooton

■ **BEDFORD**—Antioch Church's pastor, **Tom Fisher**, resigned effective Dec. 17 to serve as administrator and professor at the San Antonio, Texas, extension center for Wayland College.

Bedford Church called **Jeff Combs** as pastor. Combs previously served as pastor of New Liberty Church, Owen County.

■ **CAMPBELLSVILLE**—Mt. Carmel Church ordained **Donald Auberry** to the gospel ministry. Auberry is pastor of New Bethlehem Church. **Tom Coffey** is pastor of Mt. Carmel Church.

■ **MADISONVILLE**—First Church called **Harold Greenfield**, retired director of missions of Caldwell-Lyon Association, as interim pastor.

Pond River Church called **Adam Brown** as pastor. Brown was ordained into the gospel ministry at Calvary Church in Central City.

■ **MAYFIELD**—High Point Church ordained **Ed Burge**, **Bobby Pierceall**, **Keith Price** and **John Wynstra** as deacons. **Jeff Vann** is pastor.

West Broadway Church called **Harry Yates** as pastor.

■ **PADUCAH**—Immanuel Church called **Rickey Letson** as minister of education beginning January 2001. Letson previously was pastor of Lindley Park Church, Greensboro, N.C.

■ **PRINCETON**—First Church ordained **B.J. Byrd** and **Glenn Ruppert** to the deacon ministry. **Tom Hughes** is pastor.

■ **RICHMOND**—White Hall Church called **Tim Beard** as pastor.

■ **RUSSELLVILLE**—Woodlawn Church called **Wayne Duncan** as pastor.

■ **WHITLEY CITY**—First Church's pastor, **Daryl Varble**, resigned to become pastor of First Church, Cobden, Ill., effective Dec. 19.

CHRISTMAS EVENTS

North Central Region

■ **NAPOLEON**—Ten Mile Church will host an outside walk-through Bethlehem Nov. 15-16 at 6 p.m. For information, call (859) 643-3919. **Bill Graham** is pastor.

■ **NEWPORT**—First Church will present a musical drama "Lord of Light, Prince of Peace" Dec. 17 at 5:30 p.m. **Kenneth Willoughby** is pastor.

Western Region

■ **HENDERSON**—Community Church's adult choir will present "Classic Noels" Dec. 17 at 10:45 a.m. **Larry Haltom** is minister of music and **John Dunaway** is pastor.

■ **OWENSBORO**—Walnut Memorial Church will present its music ministry Christmas concert Dec. 17 at 6 p.m. **David Taylor** is minister of music and **Odell Beauchamp** is pastor.

Central Region

■ **FISHERVILLE**—Fisherville Church will present its Christmas cantata Dec. 17 at 11 a.m. **Teresa McGaughey** is interim music leader and **Jeff McCaraty** is pastor.

■ **LOUISVILLE**—Carlisle Avenue Church's sanctuary choir will present "The Wonder of Christmas" Dec. 17 at 10:45 a.m. **Jonathan Badgett** is



SIGN TIME Buck Richardson, a maintenance worker at Spring Meadows children's home in Louisville, sets up a sign with the help of a resident of the home. The Christmas sign was placed in front of Shelbyville Road for passing motorists.

minister of music and worship. **Shawn Merithew** is pastor.

Clifton Church has changed its schedule for the cantata "Welcome to Our World." The presentation will be Dec. 17 at 6 p.m. **Michael Karr** is minister of music.

South Central Region

■ **FRANKLIN**—First Church will host a service of candlelight and carols Dec. 20 at 6:30 p.m. **Don Phillips** is minister of music and **Robert Sutton** is pastor.

■ **RICHMOND**—Red House Church's sanctuary choir will present "The Gospel According to Scrooge" Dec. 16-17 at 6 p.m. **Gary Maynard** is associate pastor of music and education. **Larry Sizemore** is pastor.

Southwestern Region

■ **HOPKINSVILLE**—Casky Church's adult choir will present the

musical "Mary, Did You Know?" Dec. 17 at 11 a.m. and the youth choir will perform the musical "A Strange Way to Save the World" at 6:30 p.m. **Mitchell Hinton** is minister of music and **Bob Morgan** is pastor.

■ **MAYFIELD**—Trace Creek Church's young adults will present "A Christmas Carol," a re-write of Charles Dickens, Dec. 17 at 2 and 6 p.m. **Ronnie Stinson** is pastor.

■ **WATER VALLEY**—Pilot Oak Church will present "Bringing Christmas Home" Dec. 17 at 6 p.m. **David Hardy** is pastor.

Southern Region

■ **SCOTTSVILLE**—Scottsville Church's adult and youth choirs will present the Christmas musical "Welcome to Our World" Dec. 17 at 5:30 p.m. **Ken Goforth** is minister of music and youth and **Floyd Price** is pastor.

CLASSIFIED ADS

FOR SALE: Raised ranch walk-out; 3-bedroom, 2.5-bath, 2-car garage, 2,000 square feet. Below market value; various financing programs available. Homebase. Call (502) 421-8987 or 558-4757.

SEEKING: Pastor for Ridgewood Baptist Church, the only CBF-affiliated congregation in the growing suburb of Southwest Louisville. Our small, diverse, missions-minded church is committed to historic Baptist principles and freedoms and is praying for God's leadership in this search process. Send resumé to: Pastor Search Committee, Ridgewood Baptist Church, 6209 Greenwood Road, Louisville, KY 40258.

SEEKING: Minister to student. Louisville church seeks full-time minister with heart for students. Proven experience requested. Forward resumé to: Maple Grove Baptist, 5911 E Manslick, 40219.

SEEKING: Part-time position coordinating overall children's ministry (preschool-sixth grade) at Rich Pond Baptist Church in Bowling Green, Ky. Responsible for directing preschool Sunday school, coordinating mission organizations and overseeing children's activities for churchwide and special events. Must share love of children and serve as a Christian role model. For information, call (270) 842-2593, Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-noon.

SEEKING: Part-time youth pastor for Hillsdale Baptist Church, Ohio. Send resumé to: hbc@bright.net.

SEEKING: Youth minister. Music background a plus. Send resumé to: First Baptist Church, PO Box 670, Whitley City, KY 42653, Attn: Staff Search Committee.

SEEKING: Part-time music minister. Primary responsibilities include: sharing in worship planning and leadership; conducting sanctuary choir; and overseeing volunteer-staffed children's music ministry. Please send resumé to: Albany First Baptist Church, 110 W Cumberland St., Albany, KY 42602, Attn: Music Committee, or call (606) 387-5909.

SEEKING: Full-time minister of education and activities. Send resumé to: Hardinsburg Baptist Church, PO Box 54, Hardinsburg, KY 40143, or fax to (270) 756-5203.

SEEKING: East Cadiz Baptist Church of Cadiz is seeking a part-time minister of music. Send resumé to: M/M Search Committee, East Cadiz Baptist Church, 407 Third St., Cadiz, KY 42211.

SEEKING: Full-time minister of youth and education to lead an enthusiastic, ever-growing group of young people (75%) and provide leadership for our comprehensive ministry of Christian education (25%) in one of Kentucky's fastest-growing counties. Experience, training and undergraduate degree required; seminary degree strongly preferred. Please send resumé and letter of interest to FBC Search Committee, c/o Wayne Young, 2002 Keaton Lane, Lawrenceburg, KY 40342 by Jan. 31, 2001.

SEEKING: First Baptist Church of Chattanooga, Tenn., is receiving resúmes for minister to families with children. This position is an opportunity for a high-energy individual, preferably seminary trained, to minister with preschoolers and children, their parents and leaders. Inclusive in theology and creative in ministry, FBC is supportive of both SBC and CBF. Resúmes should be mailed to: Search Committee, First Baptist Church, 401 Gateway Ave., Chattanooga, TN 37402.

SEEKING: Younger's Creek Baptist Church, Elizabethtown, Ky., is seeking resúmes for the position of pastor. Please send resumé to: 251 Younger's Creek Road, Elizabethtown, KY 42701, Attn: Pastor Search Committee.

SEEKING: Full-time minister of education and administration to continue development of a comprehensive Christian education program in a growing church. Experience required, seminary degree in education preferred. Send resúmes and inquiries to: Hunsinger Lane Baptist Church, 3400 Summerfield Drive, Louisville KY 40220, Attn: Minister Search Committee. E-mail: hlbadmin@altavista.com.

SEEKING: Church prayerfully seeks minister of music/youth (full-time or part-time). Please send resumé to: New Life Baptist Church, 1185 Shackelford Road, Florissant, MO 63031, Attn: Pastor Tim McIntyre. Phone: (314) 837-0626.

SEEKING: First Baptist Church, Ashland, Ky., is prayerfully seeking a senior pastor. A progressive, multi-staff church, First Baptist has two morning services (one contemporary, one traditional), a very active Sunday school, and numerous opportunities for midweek prayer meetings and congregational fellowship. It is a church that reflects the values of true Christian love and gender equality. For more information about our church and the requirements of the position, visit our Web site at www.fbcashlandky.com. Resúmes should be sent to First Baptist Church, PO Box 787, Ashland, KY 41105-0787, c/o Dr. Eugene H. Foster.

SEEKING: Salvisa Baptist Church is presently searching for a part-time minister of youth. Please send resumé to: Personnel Committee, Salvisa Baptist Church, PO Box 75, Salvisa, KY 40372.

SEEKING: Immediate need for full-time administrative assistant for growing church. Experience necessary with emphasis on Microsoft Word and Excel as well as desktop publishing. Please forward resumé to: Personnel Chairman, Franklin Crossroads Baptist Church, 4695 Hardinsburg Road, Cecilia, KY 42724.

SEEKING: Farmdale Baptist Church, 5610 U.S. Highway 127 South, Frankfort, Ky., is seeking three part-time positions: children's minister, youth minister and organist. Send resumé to church in care of Personnel Committee.

Death march survivor tells of forgiveness

By Stacey Hamby
Missouri Word & Way

BOLIVAR, Mo. (BP)—John Playter has learned to live one day at a time.

He learned it the hard way, barely escaping death from one day to the next during the Bataan Death March and in a Japanese slave labor camp in the Philippines during World War II.

His story is one of pain and despair. But his also is a story of forgiveness.

Playter never shared his survival story until 1994, the 50th anniversary of his escape from the Japanese.

Now his story is out for all to read in his memoir, "Survivor," published by Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo.

When Playter started writing his memoir, he had only his family in mind. "I never told my story to my parents, and I'm ashamed of that," he said. "But if my story is any benefit to anyone else, then that's another good reason to have written it."

Playter was one of 83 survivors who swam to shore after Americans torpedoed the Japanese ship Shinyo Maru carrying him and hundreds of other prisoners from the Philippines to Japan in August 1944.

He had been in captivity since April 1942. That captivity included seeing comrades severely beaten or killed by Japanese soldiers while marching for several days on what became known as the Bataan Death March. That captivity forced him to labor in rice fields, sleep with bugs crawling on his body, suffer several near-death bouts of malaria, dysentery and starvation. But one thing never changed—his faith in God.

"Daily prayer was always a part of my life during my imprisonment, and I found what peace I could at that time," he said. "I had a lot of wonder about what was going to happen. We were in a hopeless situation in early '42; we knew we were hopelessly surrounded, but we just made it a day at a time."

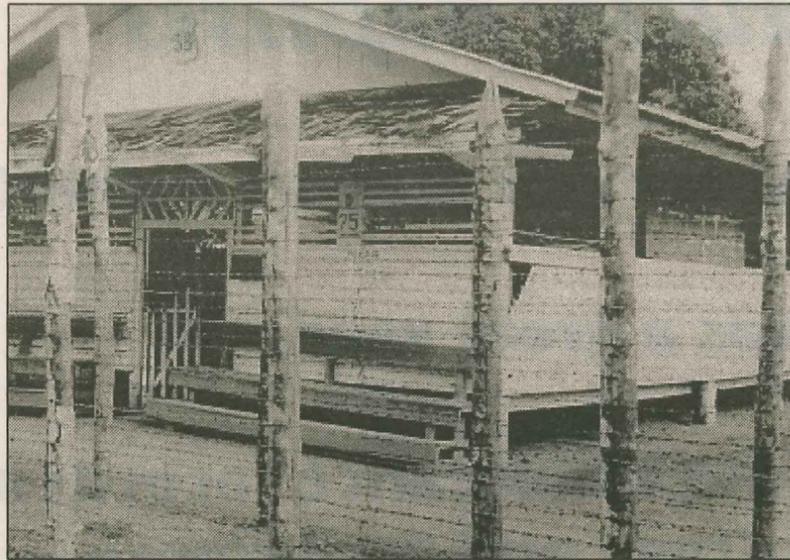
The situation was worse than bleak. About 10,000 American troops in the Philippines had surrendered to the Japanese, the largest-ever surrender of American troops.

They were forced to live in filth, supervised by soldiers who had no qualms about killing them. They lived with the knowledge their government wasn't coming to their rescue.

"The European Theater of Operation got all of the attention in the early days of the war," Playter said. "So we were definitely expendable in the eyes of the powers that were."

But his and the other soldiers' loyalty to their country never faltered. "One of the moments I remember most is in the barracks after coming in from the rice fields, when a soldier pulled out an American flag. It was a very moving experience to see the flag after only seeing the Japanese flag for so long. It was a tearful moment for us."

Expendable in the eyes of their government. The focus of hatred by their guards. No end in sight.



SOLDIER'S STORY John Playter credits a sermon by his pastor for his ability to write about his experiences during World War II. ■ **Top:** This prison barracks was where Playter lived during his internment at Davao Penal Colony. This photo, taken in 1955, shows one of the few areas in the camp where the men could sit down. ■ **Left:** Playter poses for this picture shortly before his departure for the Philippines in 1941. ■ **Above:** Playter and his fellow troops who received the Purple Heart in 1944.

Then, after having spent two years in prison camps, the Japanese loaded 750 prisoners of war onto the Shinyo Maru, also known as "Hell Ship," in August 1944.

The ship set sail for Japan. The men were crammed into furnace-like lower holds with so little space and air that many men lost consciousness when the hatches weren't open—which was much of the time.

It was here, on the afternoon of Sept. 7, 1944, that Playter said he began living on borrowed time.

"Captain Milton Morgan, who was sitting with his back against the side of the ship, asked me to trade seats with him," Playter writes in his book. "This I agreed to and had just sat down when two torpedoes struck our ship. The location where I had been sitting, and traded to Morgan, was at the edge of a lower hold that was covered with planks. This is the point that I have been trying to figure out for 55 years. Why was I spared?"

In the confusion, Playter—sliced down his left side by the sinking ship—and 83 others swam to shore. One man died the next day. The survivors were evacuated back to San Francisco in November 1944. All 667 other Americans on the ship, including Capt. Morgan, perished. Playter returned home to Missouri, where he was placed in a military hospital in Springfield. There he met the woman who would become his wife, Charlene.

They married in October 1945. He worked with the Army in Springfield

until November 1945 before moving to New Mexico and picking up his original career in geology.

He and his wife eventually moved back to Bolivar to operate a family farm. They had two daughters. He retired in 1986 after 25 years as city engineer. Charlene died in 1983.

But until 1994, he had never told his story. "I was mainly occupied with my occupation, just terribly busy," he said. "It was only after I retired that I had my mind free to really think back."

His account still might never have been known if it hadn't been for a sermon on forgiveness preached by his pastor, Ray Leininger of First Baptist Church of Bolivar.

"That sermon on forgiveness made me realize that I could not continue to hate the Japanese and love our Lord," he recalled. "Fifty years later, I have forgiven the Japanese for what they did to me. I was so bitter within for all those years, but I didn't really concentrate on it. It hasn't been easy to tell my story."

His pastor said it's a story that needs to be told. "As he talks about his experience, he still breaks down," Leininger said. "He has horrible memories that will outlive him. But John has had a peace about his experience as a result of forgiving."

Playter still has some fellow survivors with whom he can relate—25 of the 82 are still living. Last September, they met for a reunion in Jacksonville, Fla. "We have a bond that no one but us can understand," he said.

\$60 million church compiles long list of requests for money

By Adelle Banks
Religion News Service

ST. MARYS, Ga. (RNS)—A United Methodist church that inherited \$60 million has decided to give \$16 million of it away next year—more than originally planned—and will set up a foundation to help other ministries in the future.

More than 100 members of St. Marys United Methodist Church in St. Marys, Ga., gathered Dec. 3 to vote on how to deal with the unusually large donation from member Warren Bailey, a telephone company owner who died in July.

"The No. 1 issue that we were concerned about was to be sure our church understood there were real spiritual dangers involved in keeping this kind of money," said Derek McAleer, pastor of the church. "It's clear from our conversations that folks understood that."

Originally, leaders of the 715-member church had considered initially distributing \$12 million, which would have been "a double tithe," McAleer, said.

"We had proposed that we would do a \$4 million capital funds endowment, but we decided, no, we don't need that kind of money laying around," he said. "It won't help us. We'll give that away instead."

Church members approved setting aside \$2.8 million of the bequest for an endowment fund that will benefit the congregation. McAleer expects the church will gain \$100,000 annually from investment proceeds from the fund, equivalent to the annual gift Bailey gave the church in recent years for building projects.

McAleer could not say who will benefit from the \$16 million the church plans to distribute up front, but he expects the church will continue to help ministries it has in the past, such as Methodist homes for children and senior citizens and other organizations that help such causes as battered women, emotionally disturbed youth and people in need of housing.

He said the church also might contribute to additional causes.

The remaining money will be handled by the St. Marys United Methodist Church Foundation, which members voted to establish.

The foundation will set up guidelines to determine which projects it will consider for grants.

In the meantime, the church's phone is ringing and an already "big file" is filling up with requests from churches, other ministries and individuals, McAleer said.

"We're getting everything from long-range funding for their ministries to 'Mama needs surgery' to 'I need a roof on my house,'" he said.

Loren Mead, a church consultant familiar with church endowments, said the Bailey bequest is "probably in the top dozen" of one-time gifts to congregations.

Mead, founder of the Alban Institute, a Maryland-based organization that assists congregations with publications and seminars, helped create Episcopal, Presbyterian and Lutheran networks of congregations with endowments.

"Usually, they're very few, if any, members of the church who've ever seen that much money and so it comes as a psychic shock and it poses all kinds of management problems," he said.

McAleer and members of his church have discovered that handling a multimillion-dollar bequest is not an easy task. Since August, an advisory board has met with legal and financial experts to determine what recommendations to bring to the congregation, which then met for three hours and voted eight times regarding its new-found wealth.

"We have spent all this time working on process," the pastor said. "We have not worried about the details of where it's going to go."

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